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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Thursday, November 30, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Turkey Talk." Information approved by the Bureau of Animal Industry, U.S.D.A.

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Of all times of the year, seems to me Thanksgiving morning is the time for talking turkey. I've been calling on the turkey specialist and I've learned a lot of legends and facts about this holiday bird that I think will interest you.

Of course, we've all heard from childhood of that first Thanksgiving Day up in chilly New England when our courageous forefathers killed the wild turkey that flew over their bleak settlement. But I read the other day that a skeptical hunter and sportsman recently announced that he doubted all the details of that legend. He claimed that the blunderbusses of our Pilgrim Fathers took so long to load that an inexperienced hunter plus a clumsy blunderbuss could hardly bring down this wild bronze bird, so swift in flight, so shy and so elusive. And he actually declared that he suspected than an Indian arrow killed the first Thanksgiving turkey, and that probably our famous ancestor bartered with the brave for the bird.

Well, you see how good old legends may change with the years. I don't suppose any historian actually knows all the cold facts about the provisions for that famous November feast, but we do know that the turkey is a native of America and that the Indians were using it for food when the white men arrived. The Spaniards who came to America were the first Europeans to see turkeys. And we know that not until travelers from America brought the new bird back were there any turkeys in Europe. The Europeans had their chickens and their guinea hens and their pheasants, but they never tasted turkey until after the discovery of the new land across the sea.

Today turkeys are domesticated and live in many lands beside our own. If you are traveling in France, and want turkey, you ask for a "dindon" or a "coq d'Inde." If you go to Germany, you will find turkeys strutting about under the name of "Trutthahan." In Spain, you'll ask for a "pavo." And so on. Turkey is a much-prized meat today in many countries. And there are several kinds both in this country and abroad.

The biggest wild turkey of them all, the great bronze Meleagris gallopavo, as the scientists call it, which often weighed as much as sixty pounds, was the bird that appeared at that memorable New England dinner. Once upon a time this noble turkey was plentiful through Canada and the Northeastern United States. It is extinct in these old haunts today. But in the less settled parts of the Southwest and in the mountains of Virginia and Carolina, lucky hunters still bring

down wild turkeys. Our domestic turkey has descended from the four original kinds of turkeys in North America -- the eastern wild turkey, the Florida wild turkey, the Rio Grande wild turkey and the Mexican wild turkey.

Texas raises more turkeys than any other state in the Union. North Dakota comes next. Then Minnesota and then California. The specialists tell me that turkeys thrive best in a dry climate and that alfalfa fields, especially those in irrigated regions, make fine turkey ranges. The reason a dry climate is so good for turkeys is that they catch cold easily from dampness -- the young ones especially. Old farmers will tell you that you have to keep a turkey's feet dry, if you want him to live. As a matter of fact, the back is what has to stay dry and warm. Scientists have discovered that the turkey's lungs are located very close to the backbone, without much of an intervening layer of flesh. For this reason, even a slight chill and wetting may result in fatal pneumonia. Turkey raisers often dose young turks with quinine, just to ward off lung trouble. And many up-to-date colony houses for young turkeys have a wire-floored sun porch.

Once past the danger of infant mortality, turkeys are turned out to pasture and herded like sheep. Turkey raisers say that their charges are very friendly and sociable, quite different from their wild, shy cousins. And they say that the birds are also very observant. One turkey raiser found that his flock would stop eating to listen to radio music. Others tell me that they take special notice of certain colors, for example. Flaming red is a favorite shade. Maybe that's why they call the color "turkey red." Or perhaps the name came from the curious red spots that grow on the turkey's head and neck.

No one seems to know where the turkey got its name. Since it was an American bird, the name certainly can have nothing to do with the Mohammedan country across the sea. Some people believe that the gobbling noise the turkey makes sounds like: "Turk, turk, turk." Other people think that the turkey has earned its title by keeping a harem. The proud and handsome cocks, you know, are very successful ladies' men. They insist on having at least four wives and prefer eight or ten. Once he takes a hen under his protection, the turkey cock will defend her against all comers, like the "terrible Turk" of old. His cruel claws and sharp beak and powerful wings can usually rout the enemy in short order.

You may be interested in knowing that last year's turkey crop was the largest in history. It was estimated at more than nineteen million birds. This year predictions are that the crop will be smaller. Turkey raising has been on the increase in the last ten years, especially in the Northwest. And turkey prices have been coming nearer the price of high-quality chickens. This makes it possible for many people to have turkey these days, who usually chose chickens when there was a big price difference. Our domestic turkeys now grow as heavy as 32 to 36 pounds. These big birds usually sell for restaurant and steamship trade. For home use, probably the popular weight is about ten to fourteen pounds.

Tomorrow: "Winter Vegetables."

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